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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000200

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AF/S FOR S. HILL,  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS  
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2018  
TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC ZI  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DUMISO DABENGWA

REF: A. A) HARARE 197  
1B. B) HARARE 175

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) According to Dumiso Dabengwa, who met with the Ambassador on March 12, Simba Makoni's candidacy is not about Makoni, but is an effort to rescue the country. Although short on money, Makoni does not want Western support for fear of being tainted in the electoral campaign as the puppet of the West. Dabengwa is optimistic that Mugabe can be defeated. Solomon Mujuru supports Makoni and will probably make his support known before the election. If there is a runoff between Mugabe and either Makoni or the MDC's Tsvangirai, he expects "horse trading" to establish an

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alliance between Makoni and Tsvangirai to oppose Mugabe. Electoral rigging can be controlled; the biggest concern is postal voting by the security forces. Dabengwa is concerned that if Mugabe is defeated at the polls he will not accept defeat. He believes, however, that the military, with exceptions, will accept the will of the voters. If Makoni wins, he will establish a "national authority" made up of leaders to discuss a new constitution, economic reform, and a government of national unity. END SUMMARY.

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The Genesis of the Makoni Campaign  
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12. (C) Dabengwa told the Ambassador that Makoni's candidacy was not about Makoni, but was an effort to rescue the country. Dabengwa recalled that Mugabe had promised two years ago at the United Nations to step down at the end of his current term. When Mugabe last year indicated his

intention to nevertheless run for reelection in 2008, Dabengwa said he had fought from within the ZANU-PF politburo for Mugabe to step down. He had intended to challenge him at the December 2007 ZANU-PF Congress, but Mugabe had rigged it to prevent a challenge. Dabengwa then became one of the initiators of a Makoni candidacy.

¶3. (C) Dabengwa said he had been asked by other dissidents to stand against Mugabe. As an Ndebele and former Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) leader from Bulawayo, he was concerned, however, that he could not win support in Mashonaland. After considering the national interest, he decided that Makoni would be a more viable candidate.

¶4. (C) Dabengwa opined that Morgan Tsvangirai should have made the same decision. The objective was to get Mugabe out. Tsvangirai could not win, particularly in light of the MDC split, and he should have considered the national interest and supported Makoni.

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No to U.S. Support  
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¶5. (C) According to Dabengwa, Makoni was short on money, but would manage. There was a stigma attached to the U.S. and UK, both of which were seen as supporting "regime change." Change should be left to the Zimbabwean people, Dabengwa admonished. The negative impression of the U.S. as a supporter of regime change had made it difficult for Makoni to accept Western support without becoming tainted. Therefore, Makoni did not want our financial support. Dabengwa acknowledged that Western assistance would be important once there is a new government; he would look

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forward to discussing this with the Ambassador at that time.

¶6. (S/NF) (NOTE: British ambassador to Zimbabwe Andrew Pocock told the Ambassador on March 12 that the UK has provided financial assistance to the Makoni campaign. We have also received reports that South African businessmen are supporting Makoni. Embassies Harare and Pretoria contact Sydney Masamvu recently met with Dabengwa in South Africa. According to Masamvu, Dabengwa raised Euro 80,000 and two tankers of fuel during his visit. END NOTE.)

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Political Support for Makoni  
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¶7. (C) Dabengwa averred that Makoni had substantial support in the country, even though high-profile leaders had, for personal reasons, chosen not to publicly express their support. He commented that General Solomon Mujuru also was one of the initiators of Makoni's candidacy; Mujuru was still solidly behind Makoni, but Dabengwa was unsure when and if he would make his support public. (NOTE: Dabengwa told Sydney Masamvu that Mujuru had delayed his public support because of fear of prosecution by Mugabe for corrupt business dealings; he would make his support public a couple of days before the March 29 election. END NOTE.) Dabengwa said he was confident Mugabe would be defeated.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador queried Dabengwa as to Makoni's position in the event of a runoff between Mugabe and either Makoni or Tsvangirai. Dabengwa responded that there would be "horse trading" in an effort to coordinate opposition to Mugabe.

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Electoral Rigging  
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¶9. (C) Dabengwa commented that he had served in the government as Minister for Home Affairs and had overseen

elections. He thought as minister he had largely controlled electoral rigging. The Makoni forces intended to have polling agents at almost all polling stations. (NOTE: There will be 8,200 stations. END NOTE.) According to Dabengwa, the most vulnerable part of the process was military and police voting as one week before the election, members of the military and police and their spouses were allowed to vote by mail. Dabengwa said that in the past, many of these individuals, at the behest of their superiors, had submitted multiple ballots through the post. (NOTE: The number of military and police is about 60,000 to 70,000. END NOTE.)

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Mugabe and the Military  
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¶10. (C) Dabengwa shared the Ambassador's concern that Mugabe would not accept defeat. Dabengwa noted that there was widespread opposition to Mugabe within the ruling party; nevertheless, at the December ZANU-PF Congress, Mugabe, despite knowledge that the country was sinking, had chosen to foreclose discussion of succession and appeared intent on continuing in office.

¶11. (C) Dabengwa was optimistic the military would not play a destabilizing role. He noted that as the commander of ZIPRA, ZAPU's military arm, he knew the current crop of high ranking Zimbabwean military officials, many of whom had served under him. He offered his opinions of the top three military leaders: Zimbabwe Army Chief Philip Sibanda had commanded UN forces in Angola and had rescued Zimbabwe from defeat in the Congo. He was professional and level headed.

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Perence Shiri, Commander of the Air Force, had long been critical of Mugabe's leadership and his unwillingness to permit change within ZANU-PF. He had repented of his role in Gukurahundi, the Matabeleland massacres instigated by Mugabe in the early 1980s. Defense Forces Commander Constantine Chiwenga, on the other hand, was so corrupt that "he would rather sink with the ship than oppose the captain." (NOTE: Chiwenga recently told The Standard newspaper that "elections are coming and the army will not support or salute sell-outs and agents of the West before, during and after the presidential elections." END NOTE.)

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Makoni's Plan for a National Authority  
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¶12. (C) If Makoni is elected, Dabengwa told the Ambassador, he would establish a national authority made up of leaders, including representatives of political parties. (COMMENT: This concept is ill-defined. Makoni will be unable to form a conventional government unless a large number of independent candidates win seats, since all ministers must be members of the legislature, and floor-crossing is forbidden under Zimbabwean law. END COMMENT.) He would then determine priorities, including constitutional and economic reform. Finally, he would choose a cabinet from independent parliamentarians and from ZANU-PF and the MDC in an effort to establish a government of national unity. According to Dabengwa, Makoni was not now offering solutions. These would come from the national authority, and later from the constituted government.

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (C) Nicholas Goche told the Ambassador that Solomon Mujuru had pledged his loyalty to Mugabe (Ref A), and a March 13 banner headline in The Herald announced that "Gen Mujuru Disowns Makoni." Nevertheless, Dabengwa, a long-time ally of Mujuru from the pre-independence days when Mujuru commanded ZANLA (the military arm of ZANU) forces and Dabengwa

commanded ZIPRA forces, is in a position to know the truth. His assertion that Mujuru is backing Makoni jives with what we have heard from other Makoni supporters. Mujuru appears to be deceiving Mugabe in the same way Makoni did before announcing his candidacy.

¶14. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: We have received numerous reports that a large number of the military are dissatisfied with the status quo and support a change in leadership. Solomon Mujuru continues to enjoy widespread support from within the military. Sibanda and Shiri can be expected to act professionally. Despite Chiwenga's loyalty to Mugabe, at this point there is little reason to believe that the military would attempt to contravene a Mugabe electoral loss.  
END COMMENT.

MCGEE